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THE GIFT OF

HENRY S. VAN DUZER

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THACKERAY.

"COME CHILDREN, LET US SHUT UP THE BOX AND THE PUPPETS, FOR OUR PLAY IS PLAYED OUT."

DOES any one remember the words which form the title to this article? They are the concluding words of "Vanity Fair." Beneath them is a vignette as suggestive and as pathetic as the best of Bewick's. A boy and a girl are looking into a box of puppets, which one knows are the puppets which formed the characters of "Vanity Fair." Dobbin and Amelia are standing up wishing us "Good-bye;" Lord Steyne has tumbled out on the floor; and the boy has his hand on the lid, on which is inscribed "Finis," ready to shut it down. Now it is shut down for ever: And, alas! the master is shut in with his puppets.

How was it that we first came to know him? In recalling a lost friend to our memory, what is the first thing we think of? Almost always we try to bring back our first interview with him. How naturally it comes to our tongue to say, "Well, I remember the day I first saw him." Let us try to do this with the great one who is gone.

Does any one remember the time when one began to hear such sentences as these flying from mouth to mouth—"It is wonderfully clever." "It is so very strange." "One don't know whether to laugh or cry at it." "Is his name really Titmarsh?" "No, his real name is Thackeray, and he wrote 'Cornhill to Grand Cairo!' Not a very young man either, you say; how strange it is his bursting on us with such stuff as this. He *frightens* one at times."

And so on. If you find in some long neglected Barathrum of waste paper a yellow-coloured pamphlet, on the tattered covers of which is printed "Vanity Fair; or, Pen and Pencil Sketches of English Society," you may remember that these were the sort of remarks which went about among non-literary men when the educated world was taken

by storm with the most remarkable novel in the English language; coming from the pen of a man, known certainly to some extent, but who was thought to have had sufficient trial, and to have found his *métier* as a clever magazine writer.

Some knew better, but the general world did not. "Vanity Fair" took the world by surprise. Its appearance was a kind of era in the lives of men whose ages were at that time within four or five years of twenty; and, for aught we know, in the lives of men older and wiser.

One's most intimate and dearest friends before this era were probably Hamlet, Don Quixote, Robinson Crusoe, My Uncle Toby, or, probably, for tastes vary, Mr. Tom Jones, or Mr. Peregrine Pickle. Latterly, also, we had got to love Mr. Pickwick, the Brothers Cheeryble, and dear old Tom Pinch; and were conceiving an affectionate admiration of Eddard Cuttle, mariner; but when these wonderful yellow numbers were handed eagerly from hand to hand, to be borrowed, read, re-read, and discussed, it became evident that the circle of our acquaintances had been suddenly and singularly enlarged; that we were becoming acquainted with people—strange people, indeed!—who forced themselves on our notice, and engaged our attention, to a degree which none of our former acquaintances had ever succeeded in doing.

These wonderful new people, too, were so amazingly common-place. They were like ourselves in detail. There was nothing whatever about them except that we could not get them out of our heads; that we discussed their proceedings as we would those of the real people our neighbours; that we were amused with their foolishness, and intensely angry at some of their proceedings. Any fool

could have written about such people as these: there was nothing worthy of notice in the book at all, except that it had taken entire possession of us, and of the world. Through the exquisite perfection of the art, the art itself was not only ignored, but indignantly denied.

How melancholy it is to look back at the long line of our sweethearts, loved so dearly for a time, then neglected, then cast off, and only remembered by their names, and by a dull regretful wonder at *that* having been so dear to us at any time. Were we ever so silly as to have wept over the death of Virginia, our first lady-love, when she was shipwrecked in the Mauritius? and how soon after were we furiously indignant at the treatment of Rosamund by her papa about the purple jar and the new shoes? Then it was that impertinent *espigle* little thing, Julia Mannering; then Flora M'Ivor, and, then by a natural reaction from such overstrained sentimentalism, Evelina Burney. And so we went on from one imaginary young lady to another, until we became so *blasé*, so used to the storms of the great passion, that we could love no more, at least, not in the old degree. We understood women. We had been through too much: when at last that queer old-fashioned, dear little body, Jane Eyre, married Fairfax Rochester, we merely said that the girl was a fool, and lit our cigar. We could love no more.

Fools that we were! we were just on the eve of a crisis in our lives, of the greatest passion of all (for an unworthy object certainly)—a passion different from, and more profound than, all which had gone before. At the time that these yellow numbers began to appear, we made acquaintance with one, Miss Rebecca Sharp, and from the moment she threw her "dixonary" out of the window, we loved as we had never loved before. We were fully alive to that young lady's faults; indeed she did not take any vast trouble to conceal them; but in spite of this she simply gave a whisk of her yellow hair, and an ogle with her green eyes, tock us by the nose, and led us whithersoever she would.

And did ever woman lead man such a dance as she led us? Never, since Petronius wrote the first novel eighteen hundred years ago. There was one Ulysses, and there is one Becky Sharp, the woman of many experiences and many counsels, the most of them far from satisfactory. There is no killing or shelving her; she always rises to the occasion, save once, and that one time is the only time on which she was really guilty. Then she is prostrated for a period, and shows you accidentally what you were hardly inclined to believe, that she had some sort of a heart.

Is there anything like the rise, the fall, and the rise of this woman, in literature? It is hard to say where. Many other characters in prose fiction, and often, though far less often, in poetry, grow and develop; but we know of none which enlarges and decreases again, like that of Becky Sharp—which alters in quantity and degree, but never in quality, by the breadth of a hair. False, clever, shifty, and passionately fond of admiration in her father's studio, she carries those qualities and no others with her, using them in greater or less degree, according to her opportunities, through her life. One finds her sipping gin and water in her father's studio, and imitating Miss Pinkerton; one finds her entertaining a select audience of Lord Steyne and Lord Southdown, with a wonderful imitation of the Dowager Lady Southdown; and one finds her at last with the plate of sausages and the brandy bottle, entertaining two German students with an imitation of Jos. Sedley, in the later and not so prosperous times when she lived at Numero Kattervang doose. But it is Becky Sharp still. Her mind, her tact, her power, enlarge according to her circumstances, but her character never develops; the pupils of her green cat's-eyes may expand and contract according to the light, but they are cat's-eyes still. Becky Sharp was crystallized and made perfect by her drunken disreputable father and mother in early years; and whether you find her among drunken art-students, talking *their* slang, or among the

dwellers in the gardens of the west, where the golden apples grow, talking *their* slang—whether she does battle with a footman or a marquis—she is still the same dexterous, unprincipled, brilliant, and thoroughly worthless Becky Sharp of old. Any apprentice can make a more or less successful attempt to *develop* a character by circumstances; to make it “grow under his hand,” as the slang goes. It required the hand of an almost perfect master to draw a character which politely declined to develop on any terms whatever. A sort of Lot’s wife of a character, who, though changed into a pillar of salt, persisted in looking back to Sodom, and, what is more, succeeded in the end in getting back there—if not to the old place itself, at least to the most fashionable quarter of Zoar.

Yes, Rebecca Sharp, although she pitched one overboard for the next man she came across, although she debauched one’s moral sense, and played the deuce with one’s property, still holds the first place among one’s ideal lady-loves. Competing even with the last and noblest of them all, with Maggie Tulliver: the girl who wore dark night on her head for a diadem.

And while one made acquaintance with this woman, one began to make acquaintance with other people quite as remarkable as she; with people of whom one had never seen the like exactly, and yet people who were evidently real, and yet could not be sketched from life—with Lord Steyne, for instance.

Some said that Lord Steyne was a sketch from life of Lord A, others of Lord B; the character suited neither. Lord A was accused of being the wicked nobleman, because his house was in a certain square, and Lord B, goodness only knows why. The fact was that Lord Steyne was a result of English History. He may have been as infinitely better than Lord A, as he was infinitely worse than Lord B. But he was the result of ever increasing wealth which passed without disturbance from generation to generation; of five or six

centuries of family tradition—tradition which said that the human race was divided into men, women, and the British Peerage. It is perfectly impossible that Lord Steyne could ever have existed; absolutely perfect characters do not exist. Mr. Pitt must have had his failings (one says nothing of the port wine and water; that was a necessity), but they have not come down to us. Marat must have had his virtues, though we have not heard of them. There are no perfect characters in the world. Lord Steyne is a masterly creation, but he is too perfect a character ever to have existed; he is so perfect, that we have to argue ourselves out of the belief that he is drawn from life. The details are too probable—the bow legs, the red hair, the buck teeth; all telling of latent scrofula; his snarling godless scorn, telling of his familiarity with the delightfully choice spirits of the aristocratic revolutionary party of France—of the men who encouraged the revolution, *pour s’amuser*, and perished in it, with a smile of cynical good humour on their faces, as if their own ruin was the best joke of all; his intense admiration for Becky’s lying, even when it was directed against himself. All these things, and many others, mark Lord Steyne as the imaginary representative of all the vices which proceed from irresponsible wealth, without one of the virtues which come from the desire to keep a great name spotless; able, sensual, witty, and heartless, without God in this world, not even dreading the Devil in the next. People have tried to represent the wicked nobleman often enough. Let them try the more. Lord Steyne is in the field.

If Rebecca Sharp is a perfectly original character, and if Lord Steyne has been often tried, but only now accomplished, we wish to ask you whether there is not another character in the book as wonderful in its way as either of the two others. We allude to the Dowager Lady Southdown.

There never was anything like this old lady. Every one appreciated her; to those who were indignant that such

people as our dear Becky Sharp, and Lord Steyne, should ever be mentioned, Lady Southdown appeared respectable, inimitably ridiculous, and, on the whole, good: those enjoyed the fun of Lady Southdown who had never spoken to a Countess in their lives. Some might fancy that one-half of the amusement one gets out of her proceeds from her pompous "façons de parler;" but it is not so. People recognised Lady Southdown, who couldn't in the least appreciate such sentences as "Jane, I forbid you to put pen to paper;" "I will have my horses to-morrow morning;" they delighted in Lady Southdown on her own merits entirely. Other men might have known the habits of the British aristocracy as well as Thackeray, who was brought up among them, but it is Thackeray only who has taken one of the most peculiarly aristocratic of them—one of them whose every word and every thought was exclusive—and made her a character to be understood by every class and for all time.

And, besides the originality of these three great characters, any one of which would form the nucleus of a successful novel, there was another fact about this most wonderful story, which no man of humour can ever forget—we mean the names which the author gives his characters. There was an infinite field of fun and suggestive humour opened to us by those wonderful names. Each name in *Vanity Fair* suggests a history.

Marquis of Steyne, for instance. Not Earl of Steyne—that would be too Saxon; not Duke—that would be too personal, for, although there are more Dukes than Marquises, yet they are better known. Marquis, a title like Viscount, with a slight French smack about it, corresponding to his amateur rose-water whiggery; and then Steyne, a name which rings on the ear as true as Buckingham or Bedford, and yet one which instantly suggests to one Brighton, the Pavilion, George the Fourth and all his set. Then Lord Southdown, gentlest of beings, brought into the world to be shorn; second title Lord Wolsey; family name Sheepshanks; seats, Southdown,

and Trottermore. Again, that gaunt and dreadful person, Lady Grizzle Macbeth, daughter of Lord Grey of Glowry; and the wonderful German dancer whom Becky dances off his legs, the Count Springbok von Hauhen-laufen. If one began to point out the fun of the names in "*Vanity Fair*," one could write a book as big as "*Vanity Fair*" itself. Take the names of the exceedingly doubtful ladies, with whom Becky has to make it up in her fall, after having cut them in her prosperity, when she was attempting the to her impossible task of being good without three thousand a year. Here they are—the Marquise de la Cruche-cassée, Lady Crackenbury, and Mrs. Washington White. Were there ever three such names for slightly unfortunate ladies?

To follow him through the wild jungle of fun into which he gets when he takes us to the German Court of Pumpernickel, with all the infinitely suggestive absurdity of the names which it pleases him to use, would be impossible. The crowning point of this unequalled nonsensical wisdom, is the triumph of British diplomacy, in arranging the marriage between the Prince of Pumpernickel with the Princess Amelia von Humburg Schlippen-Schloppen—the French candidate Princess Potztausend. Donnerwetter having been pitched triumphantly overboard, to the confusion of M. de Macabau the French minister. Schlippen-Schloppen must have been sister, one would think, to our own poor dirty, down-at-heels, Queen Caroline; and Princess Potztausend Donnerwetter (*Deviltakeyou Thunder-and-lightning*, it might be very loosely rendered), what sort of a lady was she?

Another point about this wonderful book—a point which we cannot pass over—is the way in which the author has illustrated it. For the first time we found a novelist illustrating his own books well. At times, nay very often, we could see that the great brain which guided the hand, in its eagerness to fix the images on the paper, made that hand unsteady; that, in seeking after the end also, there had been some impa-

tient neglect of the means: in other words, that Thackeray sometimes drew correctly, but more often did not. But, notwithstanding this, there are very few of the vignettes in "Vanity Fair," which, when once seen, can be forgotten.

One begins to wonder, on looking once more on these vignettes, whether Thackeray knew Bewick, the inventor of these tale-telling wood blocks. Bewick writes you the natural history of the cock-robin, and either the master himself, or Luke Clennel, the great pupil, at the end puts you in, *apropos des bottles*, a little, exquisitely finished, inch-and-a-half vignette of a man who has hanged himself, in the month of June, on an oak bough, stretching over a shallow trout stream, which runs through carboniferous limestone. You can see, by the appearance of the hanging corpse, that everything has gone wrong with him. The very body has a dissipated and hopeless look; he has laid his hat and stick at the foot of the tree, and his dog is whining to get at him. We cannot help wondering whether Thackeray took his idea of introducing suggestive vignettes into "Vanity Fair" from having studied Bewick, and noticed the effects these "tail pieces" in Bewick had upon those who took up a book upon snipes and cock robins, and found themselves face to face with a small school of great humourists; with the men who show us more of the domestic agricultural life at the end of the last century than any others. He most probably saw this—he most probably got from Bewick the idea of small pictures, which, from the very absence of any title, force one to think of them, and puzzle them out. If he got the idea from them, he used it in a way different from their's. He used these wonderful woodcuts, as most novelists use the titles to their chapters, as a key to the text—as a means of forcing home his moral, not only on the ear but on the eye.

There is one of them lying before us now, and, as an illustration of what we mean, we will make, if the reader will allow us, a quotation—the only one we will trouble him with.

The great Lord Steyne, the short, bow-legged man of fierce animal passions, the man with the bald head, the red hair, and the prominent scrofulous buck teeth, had, as Dr. Elliotson or Dr. Bucknill would have told you, the instant they looked at him, a tendency to hereditary madness. He knew it, and it was a spectre to him: he carried his remedy about with him, and defied death. The destroying angel had, for some inscrutable reason, passed over his head without striking, leaving him responsible for his own wickedness; but had striken down Lord George Gaunt, his innocent son, who went to a mad-house. Lord George Gaunt had children, on whom, in all probability, the curse would fall. Now read what follows, and say where you will find such stuff elsewhere.

"Twice or thrice in a week, in the earliest morning, the poor mother went for her sins and saw the poor invalid. Sometimes he laughed at her (and his laugh was more pitiable than to hear him cry); sometimes she found the brilliant dandy diplomatist of the Congress of Vienna dragging about a child's toy, or nursing the keeper's baby's doll. Sometimes he knew her, and father Mole, her director and companion; oftener he forgot her, as he had done wife, children, love, ambition, vanity. But he remembered his dinner-hour, and used to cry if his wine-and-water was not strong enough.

* * * *

"The absent Lord's children meanwhile prattled and grew on, quite unconscious that the doom was over them too. First they talked of their father, and devised plans against his return. Then the name of the living dead man was less frequently in their mouths—then not mentioned at all. But the stricken old grandmother trembled to think that these too were the inheritors of their father's shame, as well as of his honours; and watched sickening for the day, when the awful ancestral curse should come down on them."

This is terrible enough, but it does

not satisfy Thackeray ; he must use both pen and pencil to drive his moral home. He must draw us a picture in illustration of his awful words ; here it is :—

Lord George Gaunt's children, a pretty, highbred-looking pair, are crouched with their happy heads together, on the floor against the old oak wainscot, in a long-drawn corridor, talking merrily over a great picture-book, which they hold together on their knees. They have taken their place by some accident, under an old trophy of armour, under a cuirass and four straight cavalry swords, probably of Cavalier and Roundhead times. But the swords—the ancestral swords—the swords of Damocles, hang point downwards over the heads of the unconscious prattling innocents below.

What wonder is it that we, trying in our poor way, to lay our wreath on the grave of the great man just dead, should begin our work by trying to bring before you some points of excellence in his first great work. After all, "Vanity Fair" is the book by which he introduced himself to us—the book which first made us love him. We remember, in a later book, "The Newcome's," meeting dear old Dobbin at a party at Colonel Newcome's, with young Rawdon Crawley ; it was like meeting a dear and honoured old friend.

Our task is well-nigh done. It remains for others to write his biography ; we only wish to speak of him as we knew him. We knew him first through his greatest work ; and so we have affectionately recalled it. Of his later works we have nothing to say. No man could possibly be expected to write two "Vanity Fairs ;" and yet "Pendennis" and "The Newcomes" are not much inferior. The highest compliment to his beautiful, singular style, lies in the fact that it became a necessity to the public. They demanded of him that he should write them something—anything, only they *must* have *him*. He complied with their demands. He latterly wrote the "Roundabout Papers ;" sat down and wrote the first thing that came into his head, apparently. Many of them are about nothing, or next to nothing—

for instance the first ; but they are exceedingly charming ; every word of them is read and admired by his thorough-going admirers ; and certainly the worst of them is a pleasanter stop-gap for an idle quarter of an hour than one can easily find elsewhere.

The great accusation against him has been cynicism and hardness. In that charge most of us from time to time have joined. But, going into the more solemn and careful account which we must make with the dead, we think that charge should be withdrawn. The charge has been made and sustained, because in his fierce campaign against falsehood, meanness, and vulgarity, he did his work only too thoroughly ; and hunted those vices high and low, into every hole and corner where they had taken refuge. If he found a mere soupçon of one of them in his own favourite characters ; if, following out inexorably his own line of thought, he discovered in one of his own creations, one of his own pet children, what should not be there, he dragged it to the light ; and then the world, or part of it, said, "The man cannot understand a perfect character." It was because he understood what a perfect character should be so well that the charge was made against him.

The charge cannot be sustained. To repeat it would be to say that the large majority of common-place people are without faults ; or else to say that the pointing out of minor vices, the detection of a snake in the verandah, or a scorpion in the wood-basket, is the sign of a cynical and bitter mind. His private life is public enough just now ; in that is the answer. His having fought bravely against poverty, after having been brought up in luxury, is no secret, for the *Times* has alluded to it. Other afflictions which he might have had are not the property of the public ; but those who accuse him of cynicism and bitterness little think that they are accusing a man whose life was one long, splendid effort of unselfish devotion. He seems never to have lost a friend, and not to have left one single enemy.

How we devoured with amazed admiration this new view of life, "Vanity Fair." How we wondered what kind of man it was who had written these wonderful words—who had poured out a flood of such strange experiences? To a raw boy of eighteen, we can remember that William Makepeace Thackeray was an awful and mysterious personage—a man whose very clothes would have been interesting, even if he himself had not been inside them.

We remember a raw lad of this sort being asked to dine and meet the great man, by one who is gone also—the good and kind John Parker; and even now that lad remembers the day he was asked to meet him as a red-letter day. There was Goethe Robespierre; there was the Waterloo Chaplain; there was the Sanitary King; and there was somebody else entitled to great veneration; and, last of all, there was Thackeray. But this lad had no eyes for the great men named first, though any one of them would have been a wonder to him at another time. There, before him, was the great man himself, at last; there was the head of hair so familiar afterwards, though not so grey sixteen years ago; there were the spectacles, and the wonderful up-looking face. There was an equal of the great man's at table, but this lad engaged himself entirely in watching Thackeray, and, as he did so, he came to this conclusion—that the man who had written the most remarkable tale he had ever read had the most remarkable face he had ever seen.

And we shall never look on that kind good face again! Just now, while we were writing this poor tribute to him, we were turning over the leaves of "Vanity Fair," and, coming across the wonderful vignette of Lady Southdown bringing in the black dose to Becky Sharp, we burst into a roar of laughter; but it was checked in an instant, for we remembered that the hand which had drawn it was cold and still for ever, and the noble head which had designed it was bowed down to rise no more.

Yes, William Thackeray is dead. He was, as it were yesterday, in the prime

of life, full of new projects, surrounded by friends, quite unexpected of any change. But in the dull winter's night, while he was alone in his chamber, the Messenger came for him, and he arose and followed it. He has passed quietly from among us, without a word of farewell, and the riddle of this painful earth is redd to him at last.

And those who loved him are left lamenting because he is gone, and because they missed the few last priceless words which he might have spoken. We honour their grief, but let them remember that it is shared by others—that William Makepeace Thackeray has seventy millions of mourners.

Just now the mails are going out. A hundred splendid steamships are speeding swiftly over every sea, east, west, and north, from the omphalos called London, to carry the fortnight's instalment of British history and British thought into every land where the English language is spoken. But the saddest news they carry—sadder news than they have carried for many a month—is the announcement of the death of William Thackeray.

It will come first to New York, where they loved him as we did. And the flaneurs of the Broadway, and even the busy men in Wall-street, will stay their politics, and remember him. They will say, "Poor Thackeray is dead." Though they may refuse to hear the truth—though they choose to insult us beyond endurance, at stated times—let us keep one thing in mind: the flags at New York were hung half-mast high when Havelock died. Let us remember that.

And so the news will travel southward. Some lean, lithe, deer-eyed, quadron lad will sneak, run swiftly, pause to listen, and then hold steadily forward across the desolate war-wasted space, between the Federal lines and the smouldering watchfires of the Confederates, carrying the news brought by the last mail from Europe, and will come up to a knot of calm, clear-eyed, lean-faced Confederate officers (Oh! that such men should be wasted in such

a quarrel, for the sin was not theirs after all); and one of these men will run his eye over the telegrams, and will say to the others, "Poor Thackeray is dead." And the news will go from picket to picket, along the limestone ridges, which hang above the once happy valleys of Virginia, and will pass south, until Jefferson Davis—the man so like Stratford de Redcliffe—the man of the penetrating eyes and of the thin close-set lips—the man with the weight of an empire on his shoulders—will look up from his papers and say, with heartfelt sorrow, "The author of 'The Virginians' is dead."

High upon the hill-side at Simla, there will stand soon a group of English, Scotch, and Irish gentlemen, looking over the great plain below, and remarking to one another how much the prospect had changed lately, and how the grey-brown jungle has been slowly supplanted by the brilliant emerald green of the cotton plant, and by a thousand threads of silver water from the irrigation trenches. They will be hoping that Lawrence will succeed poor Lord Elgin, and that he will not be sacrificed in that accursed Calcutta; they will be wondering how it fares with Crawley. Then a dawk will toil up the hill-side

with the mail; and in a few minutes they will be saying, "Lawrence is appointed; Crawley is acquitted; but poor Thackeray is dead."

The pilot, when he comes out in his leaping whaleboat, and boards the mail steamer, as she lies to off the heads which form the entrance gates to our new Southern Empire, will ask the news of the captain; and he will be told, "Lord Elgin and Mr. Thackeray are dead." That evening they will know it in Melbourne, and it will be announced at all the theatres; the people, dawdling in the hot streets half the night through, waiting for the breaking up of the weather, will tell it to one another, and talk of him. The sentence which we have repeated so often that it has half lost its meaning, will have meaning to them. "William Thackeray is dead!"

So the news will fly through the seventy million souls who speak the English language. And he will lie cold and deaf in his grave, unconscious, after all his work, of his greatest triumph; unconscious that the great, so-called, Anglo-Saxon race little knew how well they loved him till they lost him. Vanitas vanitatum! "Let us shut up the box and the puppets, for the play is played out." H. K.

WHILE thinking it most fit that the duty of paying some tribute to the memory of the noble Thackeray should be performed by a contributor, qualified for the duty no less by his practised perception in the subtleties of that species of literature in which Thackeray was a master than by his great reverence for the deceased, I cannot bring myself to part altogether with the right, which I may assume in these pages, of saying a word or two, in my own name, respecting a man whom it was my privilege to know personally of late years, whose writings had been familiar to me long before I saw his kingly form or shook his cordial hand, and the latest scraps from whose pen in the numbers of the *Cornhill* were read by me with something of that punctual avidity with which some scribbler in ancient Rome may be supposed to have bent over the inimitable Latin of each last-published copy of verses from Horace.

Thackeray's special place in British literature is that of a star of the first magnitude, but of a colour and mode of brilliancy peculiarly its own, in the composite cluster known as our Novelists, our Humourists, our Imaginative Prose-writers. As this is, however, a very numerous cluster, including writers of all degrees of importance, from the smallest up to some so great that we rank them among the chiefs of our total literature, and are not afraid to cite them as our British equivalents to such names of a larger world as Cervantes, Rabelais, and Jean Paul, so there are many ways in which, on our examining the cluster, it will resolve itself into groups. More especially, there is one way of looking at

this large order of writers, according to which they shall seem to part, not so much into groups as into two great divisions, each including names of all degrees of magnitude. Now, although, if we view the cluster entire, without seeking to resolve it at all, Thackeray will strike us simply by his superior magnitude, and although, on the other hand, however minutely we may analyse the cluster, we shall find none precisely like Thackeray, and he will continue to strike us still by his intense peculiarity of hue, yet, if we do persuade ourselves to attend to such a general subdivision of the cluster into two main classes as has been hinted at, Thackeray will then, on the whole, seem to range himself rather with one of the classes than with the other.

While all writers of fiction make it their business to invent stories, and by the presentation of imaginary scenes, imaginary actions, and imaginary characters, to impart to the minds of their fellows a more prompt, rousing, and impassioned kind of pleasure than attends the reading either of speculative disquisitions or of laborious reproductions of real history, and while most of them, in doing so, strew a thousand incidental opinions and fancies by the way, and deviate into delightful and humorous whimsies, a considerable number of such writers are found to differ from the rest in respect of the constant presence in their fictions of a certain heart of doctrine, the constant ruling of their imaginations by a personal philosophy or mode of thinking. It is not always in the fictions of those novelists respecting whom we may know independently that they were themselves men of substantial and distinct moral configuration, of decided ways of thinking and acting, that we find this characteristic. Scott is an instance. He was a man of very solid and distinct personality; and yet, at the outset of his fictions, we see him always, as it were, putting on a dreaming-cap, which transports him away into realms far removed from his own personal position and experience, and from the direct operation of his own moralities. And so with others. When they begin to invent, they put on the dreaming-cap; and many cases might be cited in which this extraordinary power of the dreaming-cap might appear to have been all that the writers possessed—in which, apart from it, they might seem to have had no substantial personality at all. Whether Shakespeare, the greatest genius of the dreaming-cap that ever lived, had any coequal personality himself, of the features of which a glimpse is now recoverable, is, as all know, one of the vexed questions of literary history. We have an opinion of our own on this matter. In every case, we hold, there is an unseverable relation between the personality and the poetic genius, between what a man is and what he can imagine. Dreams themselves are fantastic constructions out of the *débris* of all the sensations, thoughts, feelings, and experiences, remembered or not remembered, of the waking-life; all that any power of the dreaming-cap, however extraordinary, can do, is to remove one into remoter wastes of the great plain of forgetfulness whereon this *débris* lies shimmering, and to release one more and more from the rule of the waking will or the waking reason in the fantasies that rise from it, and flit and melt into each other. Yet, just as some dreams are closer in their resemblance to waking tissues of thought, and more regulated by the logic of waking reason, than others, so, though in all cases the imaginations of a writer, the creations of his literary genius, are related by absolute necessity to his personal individuality, there are many cases in which the relation is so much more subtle and occult than in others, that we find it convenient in these cases to suppose it non-existing, and to think of the imagination as a kind of special white-winged faculty that can float off at any moment from its poise on the personality, move to any distance whithersoever it listeth, and return again at its own sweet will. Hence, for example, among our writers of prose-fiction, we distinguish such a writer as Scott from such a writer as Swift. The connexion, in Swift's case, between his fictions and his personal philosophy and mode of thought is direct and obvious. In his inventions and fancies he does

not move away from himself; he remains where he is, in his fixed and awful habit of mind—expressing that habit or its successive moods in constructions fantastic in form, but of regulated and calculated meaning, and capable at once of exact interpretation. Even his Islands of Lilliput and Brobdingnag, his Laputa, and his country of the Houynhmns and Yahoos, are not so much visions into which he has been carried by any power of the dreaming-cap, as fell Swiftian allegories of the stationary intellect. And, though Swift is almost unique among British writers in respect of the degree to which he thus made imagination a kind of architect-contractor for fixed moods of the reason, he may yet stand as, in this respect, an exaggerated exemplar of a whole class of our writers of fiction. In other words, as has been already said, there is a class of our writers of prose-fiction, including writers of as great total power as are to be found in the class that arrive at their fancies by means of the dreaming-cap, but differing from that class by the presence in their fictions of a more constant element of doctrine, a more distinct vein of personal philosophy.

Thackeray was, on the whole, of the latter class. That he may be considered as belonging to it is one reason the more for maintaining its co-ordinate importance with the other class, and for not giving that other class, as has sometimes been proposed, a theoretical superiority as being more entitled, in virtue of their power with the dreaming-cap, to the high designation of creative or imaginative writers. One reason the more, we say—for might it not have been recollected that even Goethe, whose range of dream was as wide as that of most men, made his imagination but a kind of architect-contractor for his reason in his great prose-novel, and that, if we rank among our highest British artists a Sir Joshua Reynolds, we do not put our Hogarth beneath him? A creative writer! Who shall say that Thackeray did not give us creations? What reader of these pages, at all events, will say it, after his memory has been refreshed by our contributor with those recollections of a few of the wondrous creations that took flight from the single novel of "Vanity Fair" into that vast population of ideal beings of diverse characters and physiognomies with which the genius of imaginative writers has filled the ether of the real world? Nay, on the question whether Thackeray *should* be so decidedly attached to the class of writers of fiction with which at first sight we associate him, there may be some preliminary hesitation. In his smaller pieces, for example—some of his odd whims and absurdities in prose and verse—did he not break away into a riot of humour, a lawlessness of sheer zanyism, as exquisitely suggestive of genius making faces at its keeper as anything we have seen since Shakespeare's clowns walked the earth and sang those jumbled shreds of sense and nonsense which we love now as so keenly Shakespearian, and would not lose for the world? The dreaming-cap!—why, here we have the dreaming-cap, and bells attached to it. He moves to any distance out of sight, and still, by the tinkle, we can follow him and hear "the fool i' the forest." We are not sure but that in some of these small grotesques of Thackeray we have relics of a wilder variety of pure genius than in his more elaborate fictions. But, again, even in some of these larger and more continuous constructions of his genius in fiction, we have examples of a power which he possessed of going out of himself, and away from the habits and humours of his own time and circumstances, into tracts where the mere act of producing facsimiles or verisimilitudes of what he had directly seen and known was not sufficient, and he had to move with the stealthy step of a necromancer, recalling visions of a vanished life. When we think, for instance, of his "Esmond," and of passages in his other novels where he gives play to his imagination in the historic, and assumes so easily a certain quaintness of conception and of phraseology to correspond, we seem even to catch a glimpse of what that marvellous dreaming-power of the so-called creative writers may after all in part consist in—to wit, a

wide range of really historic interest in their own waking persons, and a habit of following out their trains of historic speculation and enthusiasm, rather than their passing observations and experiences, in their dreams. Thackeray, at all events, had a remarkable historic faculty within a certain range of time, which it was perhaps owing to the more paying nature of fiction than of history in these days that he did not more expressly use and develop. The Life of Talleyrand, which he once had in contemplation, before the days of his universal celebrity as a novelist, would have been, if done as Thackeray could have done it, a masterpiece of peculiar eighteenth-nineteenth-century biography. Nor is the story, jocularly spread by himself some years ago, that he meant to continue Macaulay's unfinished History of England, taking it up at the reign of Queen Anne, without a certain significance. One of the many distinctions among men is as to the portion of the past by which their imaginations are most fondly fascinated and with which they feel themselves most competent to deal in recollection. Macaulay's real and native historic range began where he began his History—in the interval between the Civil Wars and the Revolution of 1688. Thackeray's began a little later—at the date of Queen Anne's accession, and the opening of the eighteenth century. And, as within this range he would have been a good and shrewd historian, so within this range his imagination moves easily and gracefully in fiction. A man of the era of the later Georges by his birth and youth, and wholly of the Victorian era by his maturity and literary activity, he can go as far back as to Queen Anne's reign by that kind of imaginative second-sight which depends on delight in transmitted reminiscence.

As a Victorian, however, taking for the matter of most of his fictions life as he saw it around him, or as he could recollect it during his own much-experienced and variously-travelled career from his childhood upwards, Thackeray *was* one of those novelists whose writings are distinguished by a constant heart of doctrine, a permanent vein of personal philosophy. Our long and now hackneyed talk about him as a Realist, and our habit of contrasting him perpetually with Dickens, as more a novelist of the Fantastic or Romantic School, are recognitions of this. It would ill become us here and now to resort again to the full pedantry of this contrast; but, in a certain sense, as none knew better than Thackeray himself, there *was* a kind of polar opposition between his method and Dickens's in their art as humourists and writers of fiction. With extraordinary keenness of perception, with the eye of a lynx for the facts, physiognomies, and humours of real life, and taking the suggestions of real life with marvellous aptness for his hints, Dickens does move away with these suggestions into a kind of vacant ground of pure fancy, where the relations and the mode of exhibition may be ideal, and there shapes such tales of wonder and drollery, and holds such masques and revels of imaginary beings, as (witness how we use them, and how our talk and our current literature are enriched by references to them) no genius but his has produced in our day. In him we do see, after a fashion entirely his own, that particular kind of power which we have called the power of the dreaming-cap, and which is oftenest named ideality. Thackeray, on the other hand, is sternly, ruthlessly real. Men and women as they are, and the relations of life as he has actually seen and known them, or in as near approach to facsimile of reality as the conditions of invention of stories for general reading will permit—these are what Thackeray insists on giving us. Fortunate age to have had two such representatives of styles of art the co-existence of which—let us not call it mutual opposition—is everlastingly possible and everlastingly desirable! Fortunate still in having the one master-artist left; unfortunate now, as we all feel—and that artist more than most of us—in having lost the other! For in Thackeray we have lost not only our great master of reality in the matter of prose-fiction, but also the spokesman of a strong personal philosophy, a bracing personal mode of thought, which pervaded

all he wrote. Thackeray, it has been well said, is best thought of, in some respects, as a sage, a man of experienced wisdom, and a conclusive grasp of the world and its worth, expressing himself, partly by accident, through the particular modes of story-writing and humorous extravaganza. And what was his philosophy? To tell that wholly, to throw into systematic phrase one tithe even of the characteristic and recurring trains of thought that passed through that grave brain, is what no man can hope to do. But the essential philosophy of any mind is often a thing of few and simple words, repeating a form of thought that it requires no elaborate array of propositions to express, and that may have been as familiar to an ancient Chaldaean making his camel's neck his pillow in the desert as it is to a sage in modern London. It is that elementary mode of thought which comes and goes oftenest, and into which one always sinks when one is meditative and alone. And so may we not recognise Thackeray's habitual philosophy in a peculiar variation of these words of the Laureate, which he makes to be spoken by the hero of his "Maud" ?—

"We are puppets, Man in his pride, and Beauty fair in her flower :
Do we move ourselves, or are moved by an unseen hand at a game
That pushes us off the board, and others ever succeed ?
Ah yet, we cannot be kind to each other here for an hour ;
We whisper, and hint, and chuckle, and grin at a brother's shame ;
However we brave it out, we men are a little breed.

A monstrous eft was of old the Lord and Master of Earth ;
For him did his high sun flame, and his river billowing ran,
And he felt himself in his force to be Nature's crowning race.
As nine months go to the shaping an infant ripe for his birth,
So many a million of ages have gone to the making of man :
He now is the first, but is he the last ? is he not too base ?

The man of science himself is fonder of glory, and vain,
An eye well-practised in nature, a spirit bounded and poor ;
The passionate heart of the poet is whirled into folly and vice.
I would not marvel at either, but keep a temperate brain ;
For not to desire or admire, if a man could learn it were more
Than to walk all day like the sultan of old in a garden of spice."

Such, in some form, though not, perhaps, precisely in this high-rolled and semi-geologic form, was Thackeray's philosophy, breathed through his writings. That we are a little breed—poets, philosophers, and all of us—this is what he told us. Nature's crowning race ?—Oh no ; too base for that ! Many stages beyond the Eft, certainly ; but far yet from even the ideal of our own talk and our pretensions to each other. And so he lashed us, and dissected us, and tore off our disguises. He did it in great matters and he did it in small matters ; and, that he might draw a distinction between the great matters and the small matters, he generalised the smaller kinds of baseness and littleness of our time, against which he most persistently directed his satires, under the mock-heroic title of Snobbism. Anti-Snobbism was his doctrine as applied to many particulars of our own and of recent times—Victorian or Georgian. But he took a wider range than that, and laid bare the deeper blacknesses and hypocrisies of our fairly-seeming lives. And we called him a cynic in revenge. A cynic ! No more will that word be heard about Thackeray. How, in these few weeks since he was laid in Kensal Green, have his secret deeds of goodness, the instances of his incessant benevolence and kindheartedness to all around him, leapt into regretful light. A cynic ! We might have known, while we used it, that the word was false. Had he not an eye for the piety and the magnanimity of real human life, its actually attained and incalculable superiorities over the Eft ; and did he not exult, to the verge of the sentimental, in reproductions of these in the midst of his descriptions of meannesses ? And did he not always, at least, include himself

for better or for worse in that breed of men of which the judgment must be so mixed? Not to desire or admire, but to walk all day like a sultan in his garden, was a dignity of isolation to which he had never attained. He did not hold himself aloof. Ah! how he came among us here in London, simply, quietly, grandly, the large-framed, massive-headed, and grey-haired sage that he was—comporting himself as one of us, though he was weightier than all of us; listening to our many-voiced clamour, and dropping in his wise occasional word; nay, not forbidding, but rather joining with a smile, if, in hilarity, we raised his own song of evening festivity:—

Here let us sport,
Boys as we sit,
Laughter and wit
Flashing so free:
Life is but short;
When we are gone,
Let them sing on
Round the old tree.

Ah! the old tree remains, and the surviving company still sits round it, and they will raise the song in the coming evenings as in the evenings gone by. But the chair of the sage is vacant. It will be long before London, or the nation, or our literature, shall see a substitute for the noble Thackeray.

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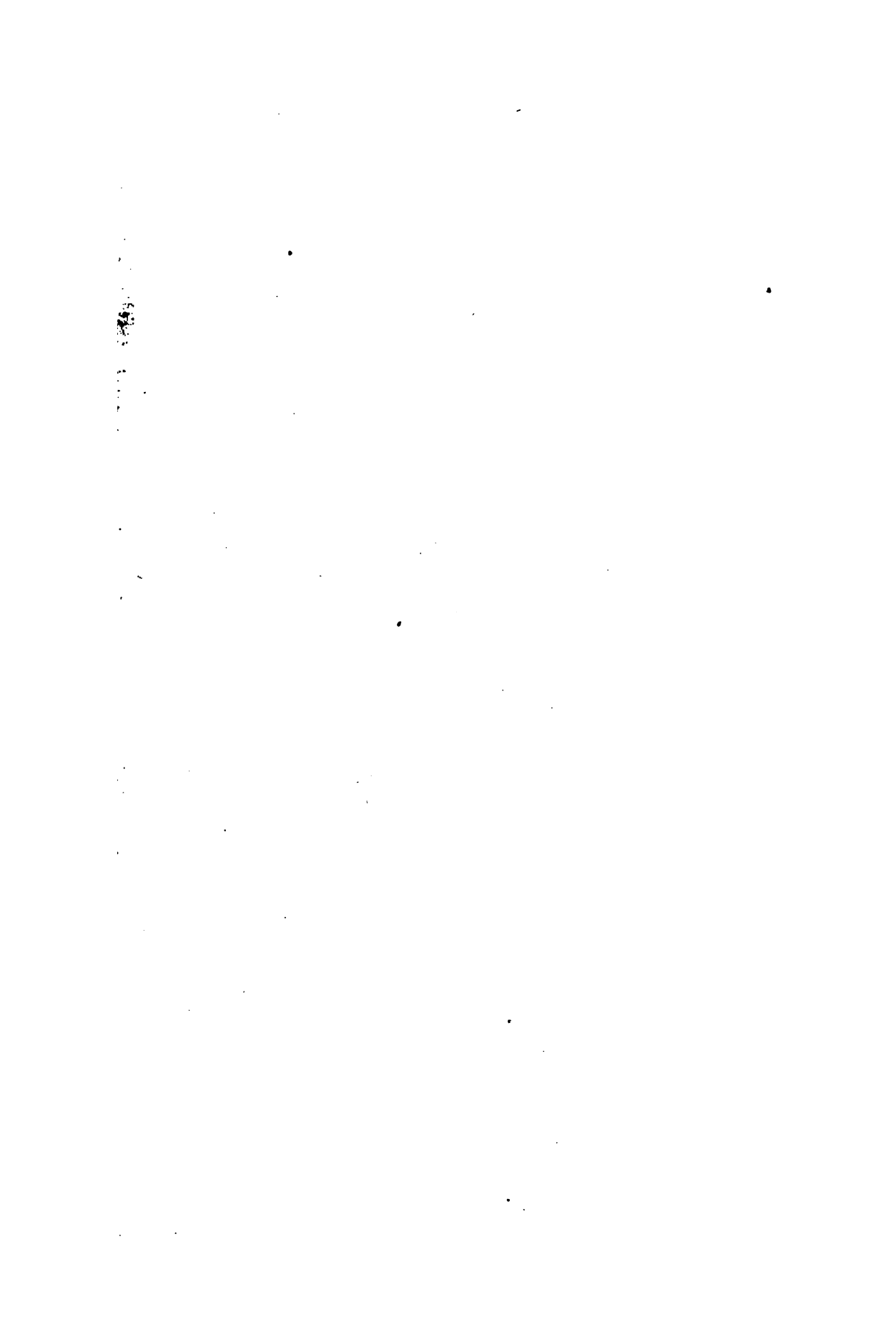
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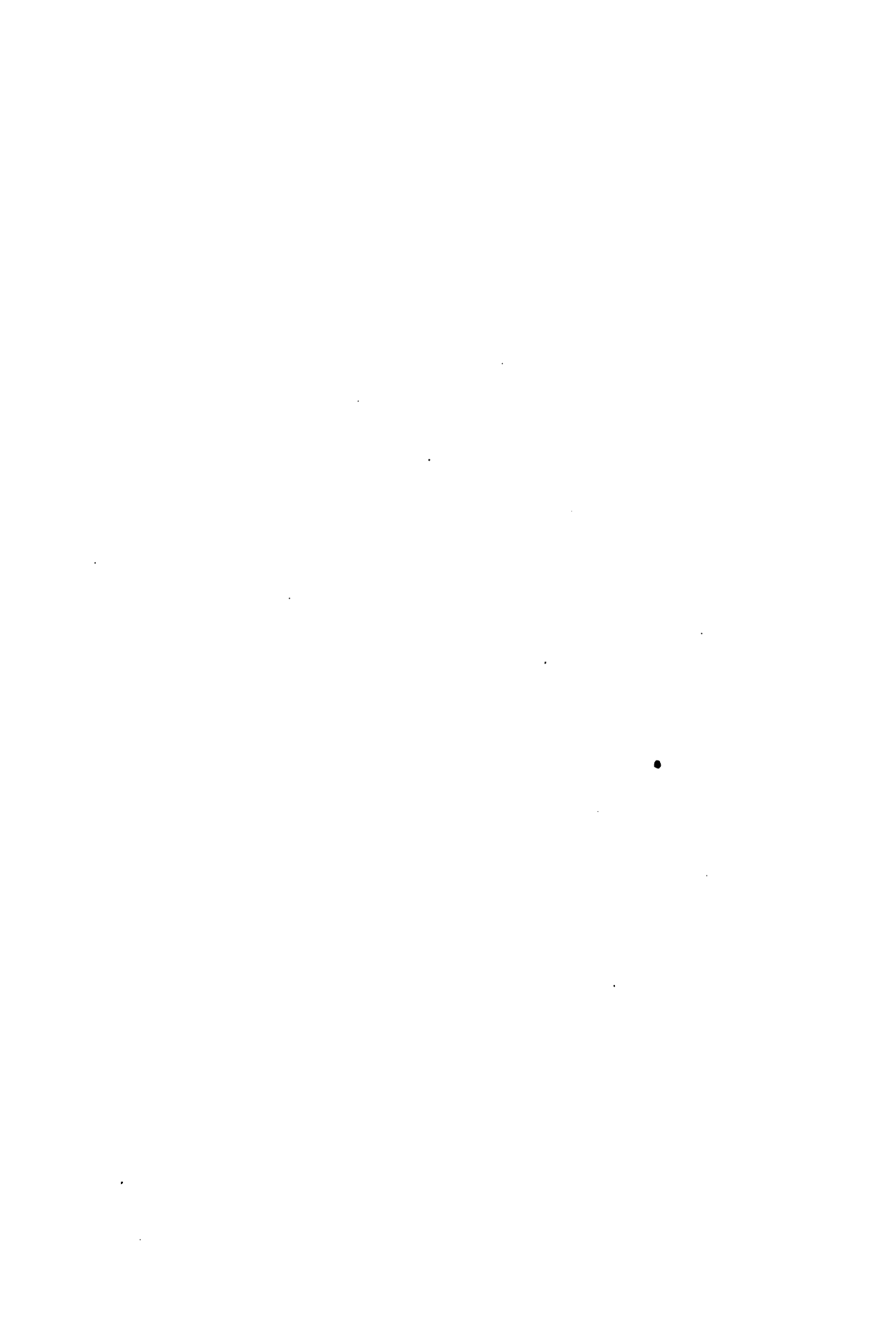














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